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Wainwright, RELIGION AND MORALITY

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BOOK REVIEWS

Religion and Morality, by William J. Wainwright. Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2005. Pp.xii, 252. \$34.95 (paper).

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In *Religion and Morality*, William Wainwright brings original, systematic arguments and historical analysis developed over many years to fruition in a work that explores the prospects of a religious ground or foundation for ethics and investigates the implications of religious belief for moral practice. In several chapters he is concerned with nontheistic religious ethics and alternative frameworks, but his central focus is on the credibility of a theistic treatment of morality vis-à-vis secular naturalism. Wainwright's rigorous, exacting style, in which he often develops arguments over against a series of sophisticated objections, will make this book tough going for newcomers to philosophy of religion. But the book is invaluable for those looking for a route deep into contemporary debate over the divine command theory, theistic voluntarism versus Platonism, moral arguments for theism, historical reconstructions of Kant's moral argument(s), and the possible conflict between theistic ethics and rational, moral practices. The book makes no pretence to establish philosophical pronouncements identifying the clear winners or losers in the current debates Wainwright addresses, but instead seeks to guide readers into disputes that are not easily settled. The following conclusion about divine command theories is representative of Wainwright's cautious style throughout the book: "At this point in time, it is not unreasonable to prefer theological voluntarism to other forms of theistic ethical theory. Because the issues are complicated, however, and more work needs to be done, the case for divine command theory is far from closed" (p. 144). The book has three sections: Moral Arguments for the Existence of God, Divine Command Theory and Its Critics, and Human Morality and Religious Requirements.

The first section begins with a haunting (in the good sense), two and a half page portrait of the nineteenth century philosophical landscape in which duty is seen as of paramount authority, even with the recession of confidence in theism and immortality. This sets the stage for Chapter two's reconstruction of Kant's treatment of religious belief and immortality in light of his concepts of duty, perfection, happiness and virtue. Wainwright offers a plausible, nuanced version of Kant's argument for recognizing the



existence of God and the immorality of human persons as the intelligible ground for moral duty. Wainwright takes issue with more deflationary treatments of the argument, overturning objections from C. D. Broad, Peter Byrne, and others. John Henry Newman's theistic argument from conscience is then explored in Chapter three and assessed over against naturalistic projects that explain away any evidential force of moral experience. A paramount contribution of this chapter is to point out that Newman's argument is essentially phenomenological rather than conceptual. Wainwright sees Newman as providing some grounds for persons to seek evidence for divine revelation as a possible source for leading us into deeper insights into the ground of conscience. The third chapter examines at close range two theistic arguments from objective values. Wainwright is hesitant about the successfulness of W. R. Sorely's argument that values must be mind-dependent, and appreciative of R. M. Adams' more promising Platonic theism. He concludes that theism can provide a grounding for objective values; it does so at least as convincingly as naturalism; and in some respects theism provides a better account than naturalist theories like Mackie's.

Part II contains four chapters that examine divine command theories. This is the most sustained, careful, recent treatment of divine command theories from Pierre d'Ailly and Ralph Cudworth to R. M. Adams, Philip Quinn, and others. As I cited Wainwright earlier, he believes that a form of theistic voluntarism has not been ruled out, and deserves our attention.

Part III begins with an excellent chapter that addresses the problem of justifying pacifism (or strict non-violence) on the basis of secular ethics and common sense, and then sizing up the prospects of a strict ethic of non-violence one can find in the teachings of Jesus and in early Buddhism. Wainwright argues that "the ethical teachings of some mainstream religious traditions have implications that can't help but appear counter-intuitive from the standpoint of nonreligious moral systems" (p. 179). I think Wainwright is convincing on this point. In the next chapter, on the binding of Isaac, Wainwright points out the difficulties that face current attempts to dispel the dilemma that the Genesis narrative poses for theistic ethics. Neither chapter offers any easy resolution of these difficulties. Their significance lies in Wainwright's clear and cogent statement of challenges facing theistic ethics. The final chapter considers the ways in which mysticism has been thought of as undermining or eclipsing the importance of morality. This chapter shows Wainwright at his cross-cultural best in discussing both theistic mysticism as well as mysticism and morality as considered from the point of view of karma Yoga, Advaita Vedanta, and Hinayana Buddhism.

Wainwright's book cannot help but enhance work on divine command theories and theistic treatments of ethics. He also might lead us to re-locate Newman's work on conscience. Wainwright's insight that Newman's argument is principally phenomenological leads me to think that it might be seen as playing an integral part in an overall comprehensive theistic argument from religious experience. Given the scope of *Religion and Morality*, readers will inevitably find matters to dispute. I was sorry that a theistic natural law theory did not receive any substantial hearing (p. 144) and that the ideal observer theory was not on hand in the discussion. But overall, this book is a mature, vigorous, exciting contribution to philosophy of religion in general, and theistic ethics in particular.